

We've Forgotten the Grace of Giving

REASONS FOR GIVING

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Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1-7

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Series: Confessions of an Imperfect Church (2 Corinthians)

Introduction: Open your Bible to 2 Corinthians 8. We are continuing our series through the book of 2 Corinthians entitled, “Confessions of an Imperfect Church”. And like the imperfect church at Corinth, we have a long way to go in our growing and changing in Christ. Today’s confession is this: “We’ve Forgotten the Grace of Giving”. 2 Corinthians 8 is divided up into three messages on giving. This morning we are going to look at the Reasons for Giving. Tonight we will look at the Greatest Example of Giving, and another time we’ll look at the Blessings of Giving.

Favorite Part of the Church Service?

What is your favorite part of the church service? Some might say “the music”. Some of you enjoy the fellowship with other believers. I trust that we all love the Word of God in the various ways it is given to us: in Sunday School, Scripture reading, and the preaching of the Word.

What we are going to find out this morning from 2 Corinthians that it ought to be the **offering**. **2 Corinthians 8:4** (ESV) — Paul says that the Macedonian believers were “begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints”. They were *begging to give!!*

Jesus’ Instruction on Giving

If you really understand Jesus’ teaching If you really understand Scripture and you really understand what God has promised, the thing you should most look forward to is the offering.

Jesus made many earth shattering statements in Scripture that ought to make us care about our financial stewardship. I want to give you three of them.

- Jesus said: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (**Matthew 6:21**). God cares about our money because God cares about us. How we use our financial resources reveals our true priorities, the condition of our spiritual lives.
- **Luke 6:38** (ESV) — “Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

John MacArthur comments: “Some people might think that that’s purely an Old Testament principle, an Old Testament idea that when you give God pours out blessing in return. But it is not. You find the same principle in **2 Corinthians 9:6** (ESV) — “whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will

also reap bountifully." It's the same principle. God is going to measure out to you in accord with what you've measured out in your giving. And if you give a lot, you receive a lot. And what you receive is good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over and it will pour into your lap.

The symbolism there is taken from the ancient Middle Eastern grain market. And people would literally go into the grain market ready to receive a lap full of grain. Here's how it worked. Both men and women wore rather a loose material garment that went all the way down to their feet and it was belted with a sash. When they went into the grain market they would simply pull some of that garment up through the sash and they would make it sort of a bloused effect. They would take two hands and pull that up and they would create by that a huge pocket and that's why the Bible says it will be poured into your lap because that's exactly what would happen. They would fill that garment with grain.

... if it was all there was in the Bible, it should make generous sacrificial givers out of all of us because what it tells us is you can't out give God. You give and He gives back more.”¹

- **Acts 20:35** (ESV) —“Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

In other words, what you give away brings you a greater blessing than what you receive. That should be enough to make us line up to give. Do you want to be most blessed? Then give.

In spite of Jesus’ clear teaching – it seems many Christians do not believe those promises. They carry around the idea that they have to protect everything they have and hang on to it. They become **hoarders** and they become **stingy** and they become self-indulgent and **protective**. But giving is really a matter of *faith*.

The Collection of Paul

Paul took Jesus words to heart, and in fact was arrested and later martyred taking up a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Paul speaks of this collection at length at least five times in four books of the New Testament. It is very likely the reason he took his third missionary journey.

The Collection of Paul is said to be “one of the great enterprises of his career”² because it emphasized the Unity of the Body of Christ. Gentiles were eager to give to Jews to show that Christ had removed all hostility toward each other. **Giving** is an outward display of unity for the cause of Christ.

Giving for these Gentiles was such a testimony to their Christianity that Paul says in **2 Corinthians 8:4** (ESV) — that they were “begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.”

¹ Comments on 2 Corinthians 8.

² Allo quoted in Martin, p. 251.

The Poor Jerusalem Mega-Church

Usually when you think of a mega-church you think of a very plush place to attend. Not so in the Jerusalem church. It was a very poor mega-church. The Jerusalem church began with the mass conversion of 3,000 people on the day of Pentecost in the greatest movement of the Holy Spirit the world has ever seen. The number of believers in Jerusalem and the surrounding area quickly grew to 5,000 men, not counting their families [Acts 4:4 (ESV) — “many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.”]

The material costs and needs of this faith community were immediately huge.

- When they left Judaism for Jesus, *many* likely ***lost their businesses and livelihoods***.
- Many of their ***family ties and support systems were severed***.
- Too, when a ***famine*** came along (as in AD 45-48), their resources were nowhere near enough to keep their people from facing literal starvation.

So from the beginning they were obligated to support one another communally (see Acts 2:44-45). They became communal out of necessity.

As a result, Paul embarked on his third missionary journey, in part (many think, primarily) to take a collection from the Gentile churches to aid the mother church in Jerusalem.

An important passage on this collection is in **Romans 15:25–27** (ESV) — “At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. 27 For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.”

The Importance of the Collection

Why was the collection so important to Paul? Paul demonstrated great risk for great unity that met a great need.

- **Great Risk**. Paul spent **as much as ten years in gathering this collection**, and he risked his life to bring it to Jerusalem. His investment of time and sacrifice in the collection demonstrates **its spiritual significance** to the apostle.
- **Great Unity**. **This offering given by Gentile Christians to aid Jewish Christians in Judea was a significant act of fellowship**. It brought together those long divided by racial bigotry and prejudice. It advanced the unity of the Gentile churches as well. For Paul, the collection was a way of uniting Jew and Gentile, Jerusalem and the larger church; **it gave Christians the opportunity to demonstrate their sacrificial love for one another**; and it showed Jewish skeptics in Judea that Jesus did indeed fulfill God’s promise that Messiah would bring the nations to them.

- **Great Need.** With the mega Jerusalem church literally starving and cut off from family, this offering met a great need and demonstrated the charitable and sacrificial grace of Jesus through their profound generosity.

Many Gentiles accompanied Paul to deliver the offering to the Jewish Christians. Luke's list includes delegates from Berea, Thessalonica, Derbe, and Asia (Acts 20:4). Their travel was expensive, time-consuming, and risky. Why was such a large Gentile delegation needed to bring the offering to Jerusalem?

We are going to see today the grace-giving chemistry: extreme poverty + extreme grace = extreme giving

The Macedonian Christians were "begging to give" to Paul. Why is that? There is good reason we ought to be just as excited about giving!

I. Reason #1: Giving is a testimony to God's Grace (8:1)

The Corinthians were the first to contribute to this collection and, indeed, the first to express their desire to do so. Now they must complete their part of the offering, or it would not help all those it must. The visitors from Macedonia to the north would soon be through town to join their offerings together and take them to Jerusalem, and the Corinthians must be ready.

Paul wanted to help prepare them. He began with the fact that everything we have comes from God: "We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia" (2 Corinthians 8:1). These churches included congregations at **Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea**. There was constant war going on in Macedonia with the Romans. This is like the Afghanistan of the Roman Empire. Not only that, there was a great persecution against Christians. You might remember that officials in the Philippi and Thessalonica had run Paul and his team out of town. But the Holy Spirit stayed when the apostle left, and remarkable families of faith grew in very difficult places.

The **offering** now provided by these churches was the result of "the grace of God that has been given" them. God gave to them so that they could distribute it Paul.

Application: The question is not how much of our money we will give to God and God's purposes. ***The question is how much of God's money will we keep for ourselves?*** We do not give to the church, but we give through the church to God. We cannot write a check to "God," and so we give to God through His Body on earth. Then the Lord directs his church as to the ways the Lord intends his money to be used. Everything we have comes from God and will one day be returned to God. All we give, we first received by God's grace.

When we recognize that God owns everything and that we are but temporal managers of God's possessions, our attitude toward material stewardship changes. We recognize that our success is not defined by how much we have, but by how well we use what has been entrusted to us. At issue is not the size of our possessions but the obedience of our faithfulness.

II. Reason #2: Giving is a testimony to God's **Power** (8:2-3)

2 Corinthians 8:2–3 (ESV) — “for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord.”

The Greeks called the region of Macedon the *barbaric North*. There was longstanding rivalry and bitterness between the two regions, much like the North and the South following the Civil War. Philip of Macedon united the two regions through brute force in 335 BC, but the union did not last.

1. God's Power is greater than **severe affliction**.

Trumpeting an Example

Now Paul used the faithfulness of these northern Christians to motivate their brothers and sisters to the south. “We want you to know” (2 Cor. 8:1) means *to draw attention to, to trumpet aloud*. Paul *blew the horn* of the Macedonians that he might inspire the Corinthians to follow their example. We should heed it as well.

Contrast: Corinth – Rich / Macedonia – Persecuted and Poor

The Corinthians lived in one of the richest cities on earth. Situated at a lucrative position on the ancient trade routes, their merchants accrued enormous wealth. By contrast, the Macedonians gave “in a severe test of affliction” (8:2). “Test” translates a word that means *to be crushed by a heavy stone*. They faced enormous persecution for their faith.³ The abuse Paul had faced in their cities continued for those who followed his Lord.

Theirs was “extreme poverty” as well (2 Cor. 8:2). Their region had at one time been rich, but the Romans had taken possession of their gold and silver mines, decimating the region economically. “Poverty” (*ptokeia*) is the Greek word for **someone who has nothing and is in imminent danger of starvation**.

Despite such obstacles, the offering the poor Macedonians contributed “overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part” (8:2). The word translated “generosity” means *true open-heartedness with no duplicity of motive*. Their gift was single-minded or single-hearted, given only for the glory of God and the good of their people.

2. God's Power is seen in **sacrificial giving**.

The Macedonian believers “gave according to their means” (8:3), a common phrase that means *to give as much as one is able*. But their gift was even “beyond their means” (8:3). In other words, they gave **more than what they should have been able to afford to give**.

- Do what you can with within your means
- Dare to go beyond your means.

³ see Philippians 1:29-30; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14; 3:3-4; 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10

God was doing a work in the Roman Empire, and many of the main missionary leaders were from Judea. The Macedonian believers saw how God used the meager resources the early missionaries had, and they were motivated to give!

The fact that God can use our financial commitments to affect such eternal significance is all the more reason to follow God's will with our money today. God turns finances into faith, resources into regenerated souls. When we understand the spiritual potential of our financial faithfulness, we are encouraged to give with gratitude and sacrifice.

III. Reason #3: Giving is a testimony to our **Progress** in sanctification (8:4-7)

We see an amazing example of the spiritual growth among the Macedonians (Philippians, Thessalonians, and the Bereans). You can know you growing spiritually by your growth in giving.

2 Corinthians 8:4–7 (ESV) — “**begging us earnestly** for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— 5 and this, not as we expected, but they **gave themselves first to the Lord** and then **by the will of God** to us. 6 Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. 7 But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—**see that you excel in this act of grace also.**”

1. Grow by giving **earnestly** (vs. 4).

Verse 4, “**begging us earnestly** for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—”

Such sacrifice was the initiative of the Macedonian believers, as they were “**begging... earnestly**” with Paul for this privilege of giving (8:4). They did the begging, not Paul. Apparently the apostle had been reluctant to ask them to help, given their enormous poverty, and so they requested this privilege themselves. When last did members of the church you belong to plead with the pastor to be allowed to give more sacrificially?

2. Grow by giving **prayerfully** (vs. 5).

Verse 5, “and this, not as we expected, but they **gave themselves first to the Lord** and then **by the will of God** to us.”

Their offering was motivated by an “**abundance of joy**” (8:2). How could they have such joy in the midst of such hardships? How could they have experienced such joy by giving so sacrificially? Here is the answer: “**they gave themselves first to the Lord** and then **by the will of God** to us” (8:5). They gave themselves, personally and fully, to Jesus as their Lord. Then it was an obvious next step to give their finances to the Lord's kingdom.

Application: As we give ourselves to the Lord, our values will shift from earthly needs to spiritual needs, and our treasure will reflect kingdom values. “**Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also**” (**Matthew 6:21**).

3. **Grow by giving submissively** (vs. 6; Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17).

Both Paul and Titus were urging the Corinthians to give. **Verse 6**, “Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace.”

God has placed overseers over the flock. Remember **Acts 20:28**, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”

God has placed visionaries over the flock. He puts in them a spirit of prayer, and a vision of forward movement for the church. It is proper that God’s people love and support their leaders. This is what the writer of Hebrews also urged.

Hebrews 13:17 (ESV) — “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

4. **Grow by giving consistently** (vs. 6; 2 Cor. 9:7; Mal. 3:8-12).

Verse 6, “so he should complete among you this act of grace”. Their giving needed to be consistent and predictable. They had said they would give to this offering. They were one of the first to suggest it. But they had not yet completed giving what they committed to.

Committed Christians have a habit of giving consistently and predictably. They must do so voluntarily. **2 Corinthians 9:7** (ESV) — “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Paul told the Corinthians in **1Cor. 16:2**, “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.” Paul is using the language of the Old Testament, that of storehouse tithing. This language comes from Malachi 3.

Storehouse Tithing

This was also true of the believers of old. Look at Malachi 3:8-12, “Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. 10 Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. 11 I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts. 12 Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.”

The point is, the New Testament teaches that we are to give consistently and voluntarily according to our income. It also seems to suggest that a tithe is a good place to start. Growing Christians give consistently to the work of the Lord.

Transition: Ultimately, giving is a measure of your spiritual growth. If you rarely give, there is a spiritual problem. If you see a child who can’t feed himself, that is not sad – it’s expected! But if an adult can’t feed himself, and has to wear diapers you have a problem. Paul ends by saying one way you show spiritual maturity is by giving.

5. Growth in giving is a measure of your spiritual growth (vs. 7).
Verse 7, “But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.”

Paul urged the Corinthians to follow the example of their Macedonian brothers and sisters (8:6-7). The believers in Corinth “excel in everything,” including their “faith,” “speech,” “knowledge,” “earnestness,” and “love” for Paul (8:7). So they must “also excel in this grace of giving” (8:7).

Application: Do you want to be more like the Macedonians or the Corinthians? Do you want the joy that Jesus can give only to those who have placed everything in Jesus’ hands? He can bless only what he owns. Carpenters can sand and paint only the wood they can touch. Surgeons can help only the patients who allow them to operate. ***If your possessions remain yours, God can do nothing with them of eternal significance.*** They will one day belong to others or disappear forever. But if you will trust your life and then your money to God’s purpose, surrendering everything to God’s Lordship, you will receive the “overflowing joy” God can give only to those who are fully his.

Is giving a joy for you? When last did it cost you something to support God’s kingdom? Would someone looking through your checkbook say you are more like the **Macedonians** or the **Corinthians**?

Conclusion

Let me close by reminding you of the grace-giving chemistry: extreme poverty + extreme grace = extreme giving.

We have learned today that our financial commitments bear spiritual fruit. The collection taken by Paul and the Gentile churches for the impoverished believers in Jerusalem would **unify** the church and show the Jewish world that Jesus was truly the Messiah. God turned their support into a missionary network that turned the world upside down. God does the same for the work here in Hanover Park and in our missionary commitments around the world.

Giving is a testimony to God’s **grace**, God’s **power**, and your **growth** in Grace! Every collection, every offering, in the church is a corporate “act of grace.” Let us seek to excel in this grace also!